

Message Text

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64

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 AID-20 PC-04 DRC-01 /115 W

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R 211059Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3459

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY RANGOON UNN

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSLL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 8277

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT,

SUBJECT: CRIME RISE ADDS TO THE THAI GOVERNMENT'S PROBLEMS

SUMMARY: PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT THE HIGH CRIME RATE IN METROPOLITAN BANGKOK IS ADDING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S WOES. POLICE ARE MOBILIZING TO COMBAT CRIME AND CALM PUBLIC FEARS BUT THE CRIME RISE INEVITABLY WEAKNES PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THAI GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND THE LOCAL PRESS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED IN RECENT WEEKS ABOUT THE RISING CRIME RATE, PARTICULARLY IN METROPOLITAN BANGKOK. THE MURDERS OF "BANGKOK POST" REPORTER CLAUDIA ROSS AND A FILIPINO BUSINESSMAN IN THEIR HOMES, AS WELL AS MANY LESSER CRIMES, HAVE FUELED CONCERN ABOUT THE RISING CRIME RATE. SEVERAL LOCAL PAPERS REPORTED MAY 8 THAT PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK HAD EXPRESSED IN AN INTERVIEW HIS GREAT CONCERN OVER THE OUTBREAK OF 32 ROBBER CASES WITHIN
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SEVEN DAYS. METROPOLITAN POLICE COMMISSIONER POL. LT.

GEN. NARON MAHANON ANNOUNCED AT A MAY 14 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE HAS PUT 5000 POLICEMEN, INCLUDING 2000 RECRUITS FROM OTHER POLICE DIVISIONS, ON A ROUND-THE-CLOCK CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THE CRIME RATE IN BANGKOK TO EARLIER LEVELS BY THE END OF THIS MONTH. SOME POLICE OFFICIALS HAVE EVEN URGED PRIVATE CITIZENS TO ARM THEMSELVES FOR PROTECTION AGAINST CRIMINALS.

2. THE CRIME RISE IS UNDOUBTEDLY REAL. METROPOLITAN POLICE CRIME REPORTS FOR MARCH AND APRIL 1974 ARE 50 - 100 PERCENT ABOVE THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR IN ALL CATEGORIES, BUT IN MOST CATEGORIES THEY ARE BELOW THE FIGURES FOR NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1973, WHEN POLICE MORALE WAS AT ITS LOWEST EBB FOLLOWING THE VIOLENCE ASSOCIATED WITH THE OCTOBER CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH TEMPORARY UPSWINGS IN THE CRIME RATE HAVE OCCURRED PERIODICALLY IN RECENT YEARS, THE CRIME RISE AT THIS TIME IS POLITICALLY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT ADDS TO THE MANY OTHER DIFFICULT PROBLEMS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT FACES. THE CRIME RISE HAS CREATED A CLIMATE OF FEAR IN THE CAPITAL WHICH INEVITABLY WEAKENS PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE POLICE.

3. POLICE LT. GENERAL NARONG'S MAY 14 ANNOUNCEMENT OF A "WAR ON CRIME"

WAS INTENDED TO QUIET PUBLIC FEARS AND RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE POLICE. HE TOLD THE PRESS MAY 17 THAT THE CRIME RATE HAS ALREADY DROPPED SINCE THE MOBILIZED POLICE FORCE WENT INTO ACTION. BUT HIS STATEMENTS AT THE MAY 14 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE RISE IN CRIME STEMS FROM THE TIME OF THE OCTOBER UPRISING, AND THAT APRIL AND MAY CRIME FIGURES ARE THE HIGHEST EVER RECORDED FOR THESE MONTHS CAN HARDLY BE OF COMFORT TO THE GOVERNMENT.

4. SOME OFFICIALS AND COMMENTATORS HAVE ATTRIBUTED THE CRIME RISE TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH CAUSE POOR PEOPLE TO STEAL. OTHERS HAVE CITED A LAXITY IN LAW ENFORCEMENT BY POLICE AND THE COURTS. THERE IS EVEN SOME SUSPICION THAT POLICEMEN ARE BEING DELIBERATELY LAX TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT OR THE ARMY OFFICERS WHO LEAD THE THAI NATIONAL POLICE DEPARTMENT. SOME SAY THAT THE PUBLIC INTERPRETS DEMOCRACY AS THE RIGHT TO DO WHATEVER ONE WANTS

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WITHOUT FEAR OF THE POLICE. OTHERS POINT TO THE INCREASING NUMBER OF BARS AND NIGHTCLUBS WHICH HAVE BECOME A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE ON THAI YOUTH, AND HANGOUTS FOR CRIMINALS.

5. COMMENT: WHATEVER THE CAUSES, PUBLIC FEARS OF A CRIME WAVE DAMAGE THE STANDING OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR ADDS TO THE GOVERNMENT'S IMAGE

OF WEAKNESS.
MASTERS

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CRIMES, PRESS COMMENTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, POLICE FORCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BANGKO08277
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740126-0453
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740532/aaaabbrr.tel
Line Count: 117
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 JUL 2002 by elyme>; APPROVED <26 FEB 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CRIME RISE ADDS TO THE THAI GOVERNMENT'S PROBLEMS SUMMARY: PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT THE HIGH CRIME RATE IN
TAGS: PGOV, PINT
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005